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# LETTER

OF

WILLIAM FAYETTE McMULLIN,

TO

## THE PEOPLE

OF THE

### THIRTEENTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA.

FELLOW-CITIZENS: It has been my habit, for many years, whilst in the public service, to address you by letter and in public speeches. I feel that it is not only my privilege, but a duty which I owe to you as a generous and confiding constituency, and to myself as the representative of a free and independent people, again to address you, and to express to you my opinion of the importance of the next presidential election.

You will no doubt remember that during my late canvass as a candidate for your suffrages, I told you, in every speech which I delivered, that we were in the midst of a political revolution, and that, if the administration of the general government should by chance fall into the hands of the abolitionists, or black republicans, as now known, and they should carry out the measures of public policy to which they had pledged themselves in and out of Congress, and to which they now stand pledged—to wit, to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia; to interdict, by congressional legislation, the slave trade between the States; to repeal the fugitive slave law; to restore the Missouri restriction, and refuse to admit into the Union either State with a republican constitution recognising slavery—that then, these measures being consummated, there would be a dissolution of the Union.

I am no alarmist, nor do I desire to disturb the peace and quiet of my countrymen. But when I see an attempt made, and the purpose avowed, to carry out measures which, if effected, must inevitably result in a dissolution of our glorious Union, I feel it my duty to warn you of the danger. Nearly one-half of my life has been spent in the councils of my country, and at no time, in my opinion, has there been such danger of a wreck of the ship of State as the present. I may be asked if my fears are well-founded. Well, let us look at a few facts on which I base these fears. Go back to the convention that framed the Federal Constitution, and look at the difficulties which beset our fathers, growing out of the slavery question, and which had well-nigh prevented the accomplishment of the object for which they had assembled. But the question was settled. And how? By leaving to each State the right to determine for itself whether slavery should exist or not. Prior to the adoption of the constitution slavery was recognised in all of the colonies, and at its adoption there was but a single non-slaveholding State. It therefore seems to me that the question was fairly and honorably adjusted, and I cannot see how any honest man can now raise an objection to such adjustment. The people of the North were the first to engage in the African slave trade, which soon was carried on in vessels fitted out, manned, and equipped, in northern ports. It is true that slavery has been abolished in the

northern States—not by emancipation, but by sale, and for value received. Finding such labor unsuited to a northern climate, the slaves were sold to our fathers of the South, and the proceeds pocketed. In the North slavery is but an abstract question, whilst in the South it is a practical one. We have about fifteen hundred millions of dollars vested in this kind of property for agricultural purposes, &c. I beg you to remember that cotton is the great staple of the South—yes, it is the “Samson’s hair of America”—and the market price of this staple regulates the price of all southern and western products, and also the value of the stock upon your farms. When we bear in mind that the people of the North are the beneficiaries of this great staple, produced by slave labor, and for the cultivation of which no other is well suited, their prejudice and aggressive policy can only be attributed to the blindest fanaticism, or a total disregard of the allegiance which they owe to the federal constitution. By some, slavery is thought to be morally wrong, and in violation of the Divine law. Hence the political doctrine of the “higher law” in mitigation of treason to the constitution. To those who think thus I would call their attention to the following passages of Scripture: Exod., xxi, 4, 5, 6, 7; Deut., xx, 14; Lev., xxv, 44, 45; Gen., xvi, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9; xx, 14; xxiv, 59, 61. If Providence is not pleased with the people of the South for holding slaves, it is strange, indeed, that we are permitted to increase in wealth, knowledge, arts, science, and religion, and to triumph in all the wars in which we have been engaged.

After the formation of the constitution, the next great agitation of the slavery question was on the application of Missouri for admission into the Union. Then it was that the South committed a great error. You will remember that when I was first a candidate for Congress I took the ground that the national legislature had no power under the constitution to legislate upon the subject of slavery, except to protect it. I told you then, as I also declared in a speech in the House of Representatives on the 8th day of June, 1850, that had I been a member at the time of the admission of Missouri, I would have opposed the restriction up to the expiration of my term of service. If Congress has the power to declare by enactment that slavery shall not exist north of the line  $36^{\circ} 30'$ , as in the case of the Missouri Compromise, it could with equal propriety declare that it should not exist at all. I take the ground that no such power, either express or implied, can be found in the constitution.

I have next to call your attention to the agitation of the subject in 1850, when the Union, as it were, was shaken to its very centre. But, thank God! we had patriot statesmen from the North and South in both houses of Congress to settle the question. Settle it—how? Not by abolition, nor a line of latitude, but in accordance with the constitution, and authorizing by enactment the people of the Territories of Utah and New Mexico to determine the question of slavery for themselves, on application for admission into the Union. I hoped then that we would have peace on this exciting subject. But not so; for when the last Congress was called upon to provide a governmental organization for the Territories of Kansas and Nebraska, it was provided, as in the case of Utah and New Mexico, that the inhabitants should determine the character of their own domestic institutions—thus securing the great political right of self-government. But there was a clause in the bill repealing that unjust and unconstitutional law, commonly called the Missouri Compromise, and declaring it inconsistent with the compromise measures of 1850. This furnished an excuse for further agitation, and brought the northern clergy into the political arena, and while the bill was pending in the Senate about three thousand of them, in ministerial robes, sent in a remonstrance, and protested “in the name of God” against its passage.

I hold that the public domain, whether acquired by purchase or conquest, is the common property of the States, held in trust by the general government for the common benefit. And when this domain is organized into a Territory, or subject by the laws of Congress to sale and entry, the people of all of the States have the

unquestionable right to settle upon such domain, and to take with them *their* property, of whatever kind it may be. And when an organized Territory has a population sufficient to entitle it to a representative in Congress, that then the *bona fide* citizens of such Territory have the right to form a constitution, and apply for admission into the Union, and such constitution being republican in its character, the Territory should be received as a State, whether slavery is recognised or not. But the abolitionists or "black republicans" say no, and that no other slave State shall be admitted. As an evidence of their intentions, I beg you to bear in mind that not a single "know nothing" or whig vote from the free States was cast in favor of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, and but three of such votes for the Compromise of 1850. These measures were carried by the southern vote and that of the good and true national democrats from the North and West.

I will now notice another subject which, I confess, has still further excited my fears as to the continuance of the Union—I allude to the late secret political organization, the "know-nothing" or, misnamed, "American party." You have not forgotten that, during my late canvass, I charged that this party was abolition and free-soil at the North. What then was a matter of opinion has since become a matter of fact. Look, if you please, at the late contest for Speaker of the present Congress, which resulted, after a two-months' struggle, in the election of Hon. N. P. Banks, of Massachusetts, a member of the know-nothing order, yet a black republican or free-soiler. He was elected by the northern know-nothing vote, not having received a single vote south of Mason and Dixon's line. Thus you perceive that, for the first time in the history of our government, a Speaker of the popular branch of the national legislature, who has, to a considerable extent, by the appointment of the committees, the shaping of the legislation of the country, was elected on purely sectional grounds, and in utter disregard of the warning of the "Father of his Country." I am free to admit that many good and patriotic men joined the order on its first organization, but many of them, after one or two interviews, shook hands with Sam, and bid him a final adieu. I must say that I regard this secret, oath bound, political party, thus abolitionized in its nature and purposes, as more dangerous to the constitution and the Union than any that has preceded it in this country. They will tell you that they are opposed to the emigration of foreign paupers, convicts, and felons to this country. Admit it; and I should like to see the man who favors such emigration; there is not one, so far as I am informed. Again; they say that Americans must rule America. This is but another catch-word, intending to imply that adopted citizens govern the country. This proposition is easily controverted by a reference to the constitution and our past history. The constitution provides that no person except a natural-born citizen, or a citizen at the time of its adoption, shall be eligible to the office of President or Vice President. So far, therefore, as these two important offices in the administration of the government are concerned, the foreigner is excluded. But the minor offices were wisely left open for the people to elect such men as they might think proper. Yet there are but few foreigners who have been members of our State or national legislatures. The test laid down by Mr. Jefferson to the applicant for office was, "is he honest, is he competent, is he faithful?" This would seem to be sufficient, and I would remark in this connexion that should I ever be called on to vote as between such men as Lafayette, Montgomery, Pulaski, De Kalb, and others of foreign birth, and such native born citizens as Hull, Arnold, and Burr, I could not hesitate to vote for the former. But these latter-day political saints seem also to have a great horror and fear of the Pope of Rome. They cannot certainly be serious in this, but only think to humbug the people, or to alarm the timid and excite the prejudice of the bigot. This is the first time in the history of our government that the subject of religion has been introduced into the political affairs of the nation. Look, if you please, at many of the clergy. I am free to say that when you show me a pious and humble minister of the Gospel who follows in the footsteps of our Saviour, such a man, in my estimation, occupies a higher position than your President,

members of his cabinet, members of Congress, kings, or potentates. But, on the other hand, when I see or hear of men preaching the Gospel on the Sabbath, and on Mondays and Saturdays brawling muster-ground and court-yard politicians; and last, but not least, when they lay aside the Bible and their ministerial robes and go into the dark-lantern lodges, I confess that such a course argues badly with me for their piety; and I beg to add that I do not wish such men to preach or pray for me, or to visit my sick chamber. I am not the defender of Catholicism, but I am in favor of religious toleration and freedom of conscience, and the fearless advocate of the constitution of my country, by which these rights are secured. To tell me that there is danger to our religious or political institutions from the Pope of Rome, is a direct attack upon the intelligence of the Protestant clergy and the capacity of the people for self-government. If you wish to put down the Catholics, it is not to be done by persecution of a religious or political character, but by the sword of the Gospel in the hands of the Protestant clergy. Having been raised and educated a Protestant, yet I cannot see the necessity or the benefit to be derived from this "know nothing" warfare. Look at the conduct of the Catholic and the foreigner in all of the wars in which we have been engaged. They have stood shoulder to shoulder, fought side by side, shed their blood and sacrificed their lives on the same battle-field, with the Protestant and native-born citizen. They knew no country but America, and recognised no flag but that of the stars and stripes under which they had enlisted and pledged themselves to defend. I appeal to you to know if any of the Catholic priests have ever attempted to interfere in the legislation or political institutions of our country, as did the clergymen of the North to whom I have alluded. I say to you, in all candor, that you have more to fear from the abolitionists of the North than from all other sources combined, including the Pope of Rome and all of the foreigners and Catholics in our country.

I have thus briefly alluded to the past action of the government and of parties upon the slavery question, which is to be an important one in the approaching presidential election. From the signs of the times, it is evident there will be three tickets in the field—the know-nothing, the abolitionist or black republican, and the democratic. Let us take them in the order named. The names of Millard Fillmore and Andrew J. Donelson have been presented as the candidates of the "know-nothings," by a convention of the order which assembled in Philadelphia in February last. This nomination was made in the midst of great difficulties, after the secession of many of the northern delegates and the abolition of the famous "12th section," incorporated into the ritual and constitution of the order at a previous convention for the protection of the rights of the South, and at a time when it was thought to operate upon the southern elections. That this was the purpose is evident to my mind; for know-nothingism originated in the North, for abolition purposes; and when a national nomination had to be made, the only plank in the platform (the 12th section) on which a southern man could stand, much less lie down upon with safety, was roughly hewed out, and a section of words without meaning substituted. At the time of this nomination there was another convention in session not far off, more congenial to the feelings of many who had gone to Philadelphia to take part in the nomination. The grips and signs were carried on by telegraph, and part of the Philadelphia convention went to Pittsburg; another part, that had withdrawn on the abolition of the "12th section," returned, and a set of resolutions were adopted, which one of the members declared were so full of verbiage that the people could not find out what they meant until after the election. Such are the circumstances attending this nomination, and the ticket presented, it seems to me, can effect nothing, except that by possibility it may throw the election into the House of Representatives, and which may result in the election of a black republican, as was the case in the election for speaker of the present Congress.

The second ticket to which I have alluded is the "black republican." Who are to be the standard-bearers of this black flag is yet to be determined. But enough is known to determine its character. The nominees of such a party will inevitably



be such men as no southern man can support. This party has sprung up from the know-nothing organization. From a comparatively few miserable abolitionists, it has increased, by means of the secrecy and signs and grips of the order, into a formidable and dangerous party, having now the control of one branch of the national legislature. The avowed purpose of this party is to carry on a warfare against the institutions of the South. This is the one idea and the controlling sentiment. Believing that know-nothingism originated with the abolitionists of the North for this purpose, I warned you, in a circular, which I had the honor to address to you during my last canvass, of the danger to the constitution, and our whole system of republican liberty, through the revolutionizing machinery of the order. I called your attention to its constitution, which created in itself a perfectly complete government, carefully and particularly worded, conferring unlimited powers upon the "Grand Council of the United States," over the action of which the *people* could not, by any possibility, have the slightest control; and if every man in the United States belonged to the know nothing society, our whole system of government would be overthrown—the revolution would be complete. Self-government would be annihilated, and an irresponsible despotism would be set up in its stead. Jurisdiction is given to the "grand council" over every foot of territory in the United States. It has power to decide upon all matters appertaining to national politics; to determine upon a mode of punishment in case of any dereliction of duty on the part of its members or officers; to adopt any and every measure it may deem necessary to secure the success of the organization; to levy a tax upon the State, district, or territorial councils for the support of the grand council. With such powers in an organized body, the dangers are immensely increased when it is remembered that every member of the society is bound to it by the most solemn oaths, enforcing perfect silence and absolute secrecy.

My opinions in regard to this order are the same now that they were then; and as there is a division in their ranks, and two tickets to be brought forward, I have deemed it due to you to refer to them.

The third ticket to which I have alluded will be presented by the democratic party, in convention to assemble at Cincinnati, Ohio, on the 6th day in June next. In such a contest I feel safe in pledging myself to go for the nominee of the Cincinnati convention. It was the democratic party that put down the alien and sedition laws; that declared, sustained, and triumphed in the war of 1812; that added to the Union the States of Florida, Louisiana, Texas, and California, and the Territories of Utah and New Mexico. This same party put down the Bank of the United States, separating the money of the people from a corporation—the party that contends for a strict construction of the constitution, the rights of the people, and the union and sovereignty of the States—the party that maintains the doctrine of a revenue tariff, and that no more money should be collected than is absolutely necessary for an economical administration of the government.

Having invited your attention to the momentous issues before us, and which we must meet in the spirit of freemen, the question naturally presents itself, Who shall be the standard-bearer of our party in this critical, and, without union and concert of action, I may say perilous contest?

There is too much involved to hazard the result by indulging in personal preferences or sectional jealousies; but, like patriots, it is our duty as lovers of the Union and the constitution to sacrifice our predilections upon the altar of our common country, and, with honest hearts, inquire who is worthy and able to lead this great national party to victory, and in whom can we confide in this day of trial? Shall he be a northern or a southern man? The first impulse of our sectional pride, and the fact that the North has had the last President, would prompt us to decide in favor of a southern leader; but, without intending to detract anything from our southern statesmen, I am decidedly of opinion that the candidate should be taken from the northern section of the confederacy. The danger is in the North, and sound northern men have looked it in the face with a firmness equal to the justice and

patriotism that inspired their action. The contest waged by the abolitionists of the North is against the constitution and the rights of the South secured by it. The democracy in this great conflict are contending for principles, and not for men and spoils. Then let us demonstrate to our northern brethren, by taking one of their own tried statesmen, that we battle for principles, and not for southern men; that we forego the honor for the sake of the right; that we intend, if this Union is not preserved, the fault shall be theirs, not ours; and that, if the hopes of the world are crushed, the curses of the disappointed shall grate upon their ears, while the regret of their own folly shall confirm the rectitude of our course. To whom, then, among all their brilliant statesmen, shall we confide our destiny in the next campaign? But one can be nominated, and, in my humble judgment, that one should be Franklin Pierce. His early position in relation to the questions that now threaten the perpetuity of the Union was taken on the side of the constitution, and the right of the people to regulate their domestic affairs in their own way, and to seek their happiness and prosperity without restraint, except by the power that had been delegated to the government. Whilst he has been Chief Magistrate the storm of fanaticism that he so manfully resisted in earlier life has, by its combination with the dark powers of the dark-lantern whirlwinds of bigotry, become a fearful tornado, and swept over the land with fearful impetuosity. His own native State, with the whole North, came like an avalanche against his administration, and the cry of "*let the Union slide*" was heard from the lips of one now occupying the Speaker's chair of Congress; and yet Franklin Pierce stood firm by the constitution, and defended the rights of the States, with State papers marked with such ability and integrity that they will form a bright page in our political history.

And now shall we change our leader and mode of defence? No! Let our general "stand fast," and the rank and file form upon his right, and the national democracy will become as terrible as an army with banners, and the country again saved from the ruthless hand of fanaticism, secrecy, and bigotry. Let us not, however, underrate the strength of our adversaries, for it cannot be denied that the next election will turn upon the issue of the Kansas and Nebraska bill, already tendered by the abolitionists of the North, and upon this issue General Pierce has nobly demeaned himself. No stronger endorsement can be given on this point than that contained in the speech lately delivered by that able statesman and patriot, Senator Douglas, in his late speech on Kansas affairs, in which he says that the President "*is entitled to the thanks of the whole country, and will receive the grateful acknowledgments of every true democrat of the Union for the promptness, firmness, and fidelity with which he has performed his duty upon all the issues growing out of this Kansas Nebraska question.*"

Virginia, ever mindful of her meritorious countrymen, was the first State to present the name of Franklin Pierce in the Baltimore Convention as the standard bearer of our flag; and having proven himself worthy of her confidence, she can truthfully say, "Well done! thou good and faithful servant;" and true to herself, she should be the first to present his name in the Cincinnati Convention and the last to desert him.

These, fellow-citizens, are frankly my views in relation to the action of the National Convention in June next, but you may be of a different opinion, and if you are and so express it, and you shall, as you have done upon two former occasions, designate me as one of your delegates to that convention, I shall, as I always have endeavored to do, use my best efforts to reflect your wishes, and not my own; but in any event, and whoever may be the choice of the National Convention, I have too much confidence in the judgment of that body not to say that I shall zealously, and to the best of my ability, support that nominee, come from whatever section of the Union he may, for I have no misgivings that if he receives the endorsement of that convention he will be a pure, sound, national democrat. For the repeated manifestations of your kindness and confidence, I tender to you my heartfelt thanks.

Before closing this letter, I beg leave to say that, for reasons not necessary to mention, I will not be a candidate for re-election to Congress; and I hope you will be able to select another more capable and more worthy of your support than I am.

I have the honor to remain yours, with high regard, &c.,

FAYETTE McMULLIN.

APRIL 8, 1856.









